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**FOUR CONSPIRATORS PLEAD GUILTY IN \$1.4 MILLION UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT
FRAUD SCHEME**

Claimed to Have Worked at Fictitious Companies, and Used the Identities of Others

Baltimore, Maryland – Four defendants pleaded guilty to a wire fraud conspiracy involving a scheme to fraudulently obtain unemployment benefits:

Eric Gonzalez, age 34, of Alexandria, Virginia;
Tawana McClain, age 51, of Washington, D.C.;
Ferny Alexander Moreno Puentes, age 26, of Gaithersburg, Maryland;
Wilfredo Torres, age 35, of Alexandria, Virginia

The guilty pleas were announced by United States Attorney for the District of Maryland Rod J. Rosenstein; Acting Special Agent in Charge John Dolce, of the Washington Regional Office, U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations; and Postal Inspector in Charge Maria L. Kelokates of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service - Washington Division.

“The Office of Inspector General is committed to working with our law enforcement partners to aggressively pursue and hold accountable those who defraud the Department of Labor’s Unemployment Insurance program,” stated John Dolce, Acting Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations.

According to their plea agreements, from 2012 to 2015, members of the conspiracy caused the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation (DLLR) and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry (DLI), which administered the unemployment insurance benefit programs in their respective states, to issue unemployment benefits in the names of individuals by submitting false applications for monetary benefits for their own personal use and benefit.

McClain, Moreno Puentes, Torres and his half-brother, Gonzalez all pleaded guilty to their participation in the conspiracy. Moreno Puentes, Torres and Gonzalez admitted that they agreed to have a co-conspirator file fraudulent unemployment claims in their names. Moreno Puentes and Torres also provided the personal identification information and/or addresses of other individuals to file additional false claims in the names of those individuals, and others. McClain, Moreno Puentes, Torres and Gonzalez used the fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits prepaid debit cards that were either mailed to them, or provided to them by a co-conspirator, at ATMs or stores in order to withdraw and use the funds. Generally, McClain, Moreno Puentes, Torres and Gonzalez kept a portion of the

fraudulently obtained funds for themselves and provided the remainder to a co-conspirator. Torres also allowed his business address to be used to file fraudulent unemployment benefit claims and when the unemployment benefits debit cards arrived, he either used them or distributed them to co-conspirators.

Moreno Puente admitted that he personally used at least 14 fraudulently obtained unemployment benefits cards; McClain personally used at least 12 cards; Torres used at least six cards; and Gonzalez used at least five cards. Torres and Gonzalez have each agreed to the entry of an order to pay restitution and forfeiture of \$173,185.32; Moreno Puente has agreed to the entry of an order to pay restitution and forfeiture of \$268,911; and McClain has agreed to the entry of an order to pay restitution and forfeiture of \$205,613. During the course of the conspiracy the actual loss was approximately \$1,468,463.80 in fraudulently obtained unemployment insurance benefits.

McClain, Moreno Puente, Torres and Gonzalez, face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison for conspiracy to commit wire fraud. U.S. District Judge Ellen L. Hollander has scheduled sentencing for McClain and Gonzalez on July 15, 2016, and for Moreno Puente and Torres on July 14, 2016.

Co-conspirators Dulce Oleo, age 38, of the Bronx, New York; Yaw Bempa-Boateng, age 35, of Silver Spring, Maryland; and Carmen Benitez, age 29, of Scranton, Pennsylvania, previously pleaded guilty to their roles in the scheme and await sentencing.

The Maryland Identity Theft Working Group has been working since 2006 to foster cooperation among local, state, federal, and institutional fraud investigators and to promote effective prosecution of identity theft schemes by both state and federal prosecutors. This case, as well as other cases brought by members of the Working Group, demonstrates the commitment of law enforcement agencies to work with financial institutions and businesses to address identity fraud, identify those who compromise personal identity information, and protect citizens from identity theft.

Today's announcement is part of the efforts undertaken in connection with the President's Financial Fraud Enforcement Task Force. The task force was established to wage an aggressive, coordinated and proactive effort to investigate and prosecute financial crimes. With more than 20 federal agencies, 94 U.S. attorneys' offices, and state and local partners, it's the broadest coalition of law enforcement, investigatory and regulatory agencies ever assembled to combat fraud. Since its formation, the task force has made great strides in facilitating increased investigation and prosecution of financial crimes; enhancing coordination and cooperation among federal, state and local authorities; addressing discrimination in the lending and financial markets; and conducting outreach to the public, victims, financial institutions and other organizations. Since fiscal year 2009, the Justice Department has filed over 18,000 financial fraud cases against more than 25,000 defendants. For more information on the task force, please visit www.StopFraud.gov.

United States Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein commended the Department of Labor – OIG and U.S. Postal Inspection Service for their work in the investigation, and praised the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry for their assistance in the investigation. Mr. Rosenstein thanked Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean R. Delaney, who is prosecuting the case.